Teaching Reading with YA Literature

Complex Texts, Complex Lives

Jennifer Buehler

Principles in Practice

Reading in Today's Classrooms

Dear Reader,

As a former high school teacher, I remember the frustration I felt when the gap between Research (and that is, by the way, how I always thought of it: Research with a capital *R*) and my own practice seemed too wide to ever cross. Research studies—those sterile reports written by professional and university researchers—often seemed so out of touch with the issues that most concerned me when I walked into my classroom every day. These studies were easy to ignore, in part because they were so distant from my experiences and in part because I had no one to help me see how that research could impact my everyday practice.

Although research has come a long way since then, as more and more teachers take up classroom-based inquiry, this gap between research and practice unfortunately still exists. Quite frankly, it's hard for even the most committed classroom teachers to pick up a research article or book, figure out how that research might apply to their classroom, convince their administrators that a new way of teaching is called for, and put it into practice. While most good teachers instinctively know that there is something to be gained from reading research, who realistically has the time or energy for it?

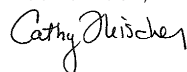
That gap informs the thinking behind this book imprint. Called Principles in Practice, the imprint publishes books that look carefully at the research-based principles and policies developed by NCTE and put those policies to the test in actual classrooms. The imprint naturally arises from one of the missions of NCTE: to develop policy for English language arts teachers. Over the years, many NCTE members have joined committees and commissions to study particular issues of concern to literacy educators. Their work has resulted in a variety of reports, research briefs, and policy statements designed both to inform teachers and to be used in lobbying efforts to create policy changes at the local, state, and national levels (reports that are available on NCTE's website, www.ncte.org).

Through this imprint, we are creating collections of books specifically designed to translate those research briefs and policy statements into classroom-based practice. The goal behind these books is to familiarize teachers with the issues behind certain concerns, lay out NCTE's policies on those issues, provide resources from research studies to support those policies, and—most of all—make those policies come alive for teacher-readers.

This book is part of the fifth series in the imprint, a series that focuses on reading instruction in today's classrooms. Each book in this series focuses on a different aspect of this important topic and is organized in a similar way: immersing you first in the research principles surrounding the topic (as laid out by the NCTE Policy Research Brief titled *Reading Instruction for* All *Students*) and then taking you into actual classrooms, teacher discussions, and student work to see how the principles play out. Each book closes with a teacher-friendly annotated bibliography.

Good teaching *is* connected to strong research. We hope that these books help you continue the good teaching that you're doing, think hard about ways to adapt and adjust your practice, and grow even stronger in the vital work you do with kids every day.

Best of luck,



Cathy Fleischer

NCTE Editorial Board: Jamal Cooks, Deborah Dean, Ken Lindblom, Amy Magnafichi Lucas, Bruce McComiskey, Duane Roen, Vivian Vasquez, Anne Elrod Whitney, Kurt Austin, Chair, ex officio, Emily Kirkpatrick, ex officio

Staff Editor: Bonny Graham
Series Editor: Cathy Fleischer
Interior Design: Victoria Pohlmann
Cover Design: Pat Mayer
Cover Image: Jennifer Buehler

NCTE Stock Number: 57268; eStock Number: 57275
ISBN 978-0-8141-5726-8; eISBN 978-0-8141-5727-5

©2016 by the National Council of Teachers of English.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission from the copyright holder. Printed in the United States of America.

It is the policy of NCTE in its journals and other publications to provide a forum for the open discussion of ideas concerning the content and the teaching of English and the language arts. Publicity accorded to any particular point of view does not imply endorsement by the Executive Committee, the Board of Directors, or the membership at large, except in announcements of policy, where such endorsement is clearly specified.

Every effort has been made to provide current URLs and email addresses, but because of the rapidly changing nature of the Web, some sites and addresses may no longer be accessible.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Buehler, Jennifer, author.
Title: Teaching reading with YA literature : complex texts, complex lives / by Jennifer Buehler, Saint Louis University.
Other titles: Teaching reading with young adult literature
Description: Urbana, IL : National Council of Teachers of English, 2016 | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2016011761 (print) | LCCN 2016023428 (ebook) | ISBN 9780814157268 (pbk.) | ISBN 9780814157275 ( )
Subjects: LCSH: Young adult literature—Study and teaching. | Reading (Secondary) | English language—Study and teaching (Secondary)
Classification: LCC PN1008.8 .B84 2016 (print) | LCC PN1008.8 (ebook) | DDC 809/.892820712—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2016011761

Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Reading Instruction for All *Students: An NCTE Policy Research Brief* xi

Chapter 1 Reading with Passion and Purpose 1

Chapter 2 Young Adult Literature and Text Complexity 23

Chapter 3 YA Pedagogy Element 1: Classroom Community 51

Chapter 4 YA Pedagogy Element 2: Teacher as Matchmaker 72

Chapter 5 YA Pedagogy Element 3: Tasks That Promote Complexity, Agency, and Autonomy 89

Chapter 6 New Approaches to Assessment in YA Pedagogy. 110

Chapter 7 Being Proactive: Helping Others Understand YA Lit and YA Pedagogy 131

Annotated Bibliography 155

Works Cited 159

Index. 165

Author. 173

Chapter One

Reading with Passion and Purpose

For almost as long as I've been alive, I've been a reader. After falling in love with children's books like *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*; *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*; and *Bridge to Terabithia* in elementary school, I moved on to read lots of young adult literature when I was a teen. Prompted by the shelves at my local library and offerings at school book fairs, I read every Madeleine L'Engle book I could get my hands on. Every Judy Blume. Assorted titles by S. E. Hinton, Richard Peck, and Robert Cormier. The complete Paula Danziger. Mildred Taylor, and Paul Zindel. Isabelle Holland, Ellen Conford, Norma Fox Mazer, and Norma Klein.

Looking at the list today, it reads like a who's who of authors from the early YA canon. In young adult novels, I found literature that was both well written and personally relevant. These were books that piqued my interest and stretched my mind. At the same time, they introduced me to topics that weren't easy to talk about. Sex, for starters: there was a lot I wanted and needed to learn, and Judy Blume helped me. Meanwhile, Madeleine L'Engle was teaching

me about religion, classical music, and science. Mildred Taylor was showing me the lasting effects of racism on the lives of African American families. S. E. Hinton was challenging me to empathize with gang members. Robert Cormier was forcing me to see abuse of power and the dark side of human nature. While I didn't love every YA book I read as a teen, I recognized that young adult authors were drawing me out of my own life and into the larger world. They were helping me think about who I was and who I wanted—and didn't want—to become.

Of course, I read plenty of other things during my teen years. Working from a list provided by my eighth-grade English teacher, I sampled the classics: *The Catcher in the Rye* because it was banned. *Crime and Punishment* because the librarian said it was too hard for me. *Jane Eyre* because it was a romance. *Of Mice and Men* because the title was intriguing. At the same time, I read popular culture titles: *The Official Preppy Handbook* because it dictated fashion at my middle school. *Flowers in the Attic* because it was racy and my friends were passing it around. Lots of Stephen King because he was my mom's favorite author. Rosalynn Carter's memoir, *First Lady from Plains*, because I was interested in politics. *All Creatures Great and Small* because I worked part-time in a dog kennel. *The Moosewood Cookbook* because I decided to become a vegetarian. *Writing Down the Bones* because I longed to be a writer.

There was a reason for every book I read, but my choices zigzagged, pulling me in different and competing directions. Looking back, however, I can see how each choice was purposeful. I read to find myself in books, take on the perspectives of others, explore new topics, appreciate beautiful language, develop critical perspectives on the world around me, and connect with fellow readers. My reading was idiosyncratic. It was also personal and deeply meaningful.

Years later, professional literature taught me to name and value these different ways of reading. What I learned from Atwell (1987), Rief (1991), Carlsen (1980), Carlsen and Sherrill (1988), Wilhelm (1997), Beers (2003), Lesesne (2003), Appleman (2009), Morrell (2005), Miller (2014), and Kittle (2013) made me a better teacher. It also made me a stronger reader. Hearing how and why others read helped me to see the range of purposes that reading served in my own life.

School Reading

I had a different reading life at school. In English classes, I dutifully slogged through almost all of the novels assigned to me—from *Great Expectations* in ninth grade to *Madame Bovary* in Advanced Placement English—but I read far more widely on my own. Even though I loved my teachers, school reading was dry. Our work with books took the form of pop quizzes, study questions, notecards, multiple-choice tests, and essays. We read chapter by chapter, at a pace set by the

teacher, guided by purposes that felt frustratingly narrow: finding symbols, exploring themes, and studying literary history. (See Applebee [1993] for a discussion of the dominance of these methods in high school English classes.) I was willing to go along with this kind of reading, probably because I was good at it. Sometimes it felt important, and even fun, as when we worked together as a class to make sense of *As I Lay Dying*. But mostly it was an exercise, and it represented only one small piece of who I was and what I sought from books. Still, I was lucky. I had access to other titles at home, and I had friends who were readers. Nothing I was asked to do at school harmed my reading life.

Unfortunately for many other teens, school reading *is* harmful. Or, if *harmful* sounds like too strong a word, let's say it's *neglectful*. When students are assigned books they can't understand, and when they sit in classrooms where they listen to others talk about literature instead of reading it themselves, they are shut out from the opportunity to be readers. Their reading lives stagnate. Or they never get started. Any of us who have taught middle or high school English have encountered students who walk through our doors at the beginning of the year having never finished a book. And yet these same students are expected to join their reading peers and take up the study of literature as an academic pursuit. It's no surprise that they languish in our classes. The playing field isn't level. When we feed them a strict diet of the classics, occasionally garnished with complementary materials from the literature textbook, these students—reluctant readers, struggling readers, and nonreaders alike—are cut off from the larger world of literacy. Students who are engaged and motivated aren't served much better, since only a piece of their reading life is seen and supported in the classroom.

To learn, grow, and thrive, what all of these students need is what I had in my life outside of school: a wide landscape for reading. They need a variety of materials to explore, literate space to move around in, and time to make discoveries. They need what Daniels and Zemelman (2014) call "a balanced reading diet" (p. 63). They need classroom conditions that allow them to become what Miller (2014) calls "wild readers," or people who read in school the way lifelong readers do. They need to hear the message that their reading is useful and good, even if the books they choose for themselves aren't the ones we would choose for them. They need to have their interests validated through the titles we offer in the classroom. Most of all, they need the chance to experience books that both affirm and challenge them—books that they *can* read and *want* to read. Books that help them see what a literate life, in all its dimensions, has to offer.

Today's young adult literature has a central role to play in this reading landscape. Even more than the titles I read in the 1980s, today's YA lit gives teens the opportunity to read broadly and deeply. Contemporary young adult novels present unreliable narrators, multiple points of view, magical realism, satire, ambiguous

endings, poetic dialogue, literary allusions, and multigenre formats. They explore disability, art, and injustice, along with more familiar topics such as sports, school cliques, and first love. At the same time, young adult nonfiction titles introduce teens to the power of stories based on oral history interviews, archival research, and scientific fieldwork. As much as any other literary genre, young adult literature can dazzle students with an artful sentence, draw them into moral and ethical debates, and stir them to greater critical consciousness. Young adult literature won't give students everything they need as readers, but it does offer exciting and important learning opportunities for all of us who teach in secondary English classrooms. What matters is what we *do* with these books. We need a vision for YA reading and a pedagogy that can help every student succeed.

Guided by the NCTE Policy Research Brief *Reading Instruction for* All *Students*, this book invites you to imagine possibilities for the rigorous and relevant use of young adult literature in middle and high school English classes. It brings you into the classrooms of teachers who use young adult literature in different settings and in different ways. If you're familiar with YA literature, this book will give you traction and support for the work you're already doing. If you're new to YA lit, this book will help you build knowledge of the field and make the case for using these books in your own classroom. As English teachers, we have the opportunity and the responsibility to foster the development of students' full literacy lives. Young adult literature gives us a way to begin.

Opposing Camps

Even as we explore the richness of today's young adult literature, we must acknowledge that we live in an educational world dominated by standardized tests and ever-tightening state and national standards. Given these pressures, it can be hard to stand up for YA literature. It isn't easy to speak bravely and confidently about the worth of these books in the face of reading lists that continue to favor the classics and school curricula that place the study of the canon ahead of student engagement. We learn to anticipate attacks on YA lit—sometimes from parents, sometimes from colleagues, sometimes in the media—even as we strive to build our own understandings of what these books have to offer.

Despite the fact that young adult literature is the fastest-growing segment of today's book market, and despite the fact that adults and teens alike eagerly read these books and pass them on to their friends, YA titles are routinely written off as not appropriate or viable for classroom use. Some argue that the books are not complex enough to prepare students for the demands of high-stakes tests or the challenges of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Others claim that a curriculum rooted in young adult literature lacks the rigor to support sophisticated work with literary texts and the development of skills students will need for college.

Still others say that YA titles shouldn't be taught in school because of their mature subject matter.

What's worse, too often the very act of promoting young adult literature as valuable and worthy sets us in opposition to our colleagues. Debates over the literature we assign and the teaching methods we employ sometimes drive us into opposing camps. We allow our thinking to be subsumed by pedagogical binaries in which reading workshop goes head-to-head with traditional literature study, and reading for enjoyment is seen as undermining the goal of reading for rigor. Young adult literature may foster a love of reading, the binary suggests, but only classics can teach students how to struggle with hard texts. These dividing lines prevent us from seeing the overriding goal we share, which is to equip students with the skill and the desire to find meaning in the world of books, not just while they sit in our classrooms but for the rest of their lives.

Students are the losers in these professional wars. When we root our curriculum in core texts that students have been reading since the 1970s, when we keep decontextualized literature study at the center of our curriculum and fail to acknowledge the broader ways that readers engage with books, we keep the status quo in place, and we close off learning opportunities for too many young people. Those who find success in English class will be the ones who have been readers all along: students who know how to balance reading for their own purposes with reading in the way school demands.

We can do better for all of our students. We can offer them a menu of varied texts, and we can invite them to read for varied purposes. We can provide an array of reading experiences: some books read as a whole class, some read in small groups, and some read independently. By offering YA classics as well as contemporary YA titles, we can invest in the long history of young adult literature as a field. YA doesn't have to be the *only* literature students read in English class, but it ought to play a significant part in students' school reading. We can use YA literature to support our students as readers of increasingly complex texts even as we put texts in front of them that speak to their interests and questions. We can make the case that students *will grow* when they read books written expressly for them, just as they will grow through their experiences with other texts. What YA offers is the likelihood of meeting students where they are now—not just as readers, but as teens who are still figuring out their place in the world. YA lit honors that process of self-discovery.

How Research Helps Us Make the Case for YA Lit

Those of us who already read and teach YA literature know there are plenty of testimonials about the quality and worth of these books. People such as Hipple

(1997), Gallo (1992), Crowe (1999), Kaywell (2007), and Salvner (2000) have been offering these testimonials for years. But testimonials will only take us so far if we want to be effective and respected teachers of YA lit. If we choose to include young adult literature in the curriculum, we must provide compelling reasons for teaching it. Our strongest claims about the value of YA lit will be ones that are grounded in research-based understandings about students, texts, and reading. When we can speak knowledgeably about teens as readers—about their developmental needs, the ways they interact with texts, and the conditions that will best engage them—we can make a more powerful case for teaching YA literature.

The NCTE Policy Research Brief *Reading Instruction for* All *Students*, reprinted in the front matter of this book, begins by arguing that to support students' continuing literacy development at the secondary level, we must help all students become readers. There's a call to action here, and a moral imperative. If we want to make rich reading lives possible for *all* of our students, we cannot teach in the ways we've always taught. We must diversify our texts and our methods. We must respond to the needs of the individual students in our classrooms.

This call to help students *become readers* compels us to focus our work, at least in part, on helping students form positive reading identities. Becoming a reader involves more than acquiring skills for decoding and analyzing texts or filling in lines on a nightly reading log. Students must go further and claim the act of reading as part of who they are, and they must make reading a part of what they do in their everyday lives, both inside and outside of school. Their willingness to do these things will increase when they feel a sense of belonging in the world of books. We can open the door to that world by showing them there are texts out there worth reading and that reading those texts can be both beneficial and enjoyable. We can involve them in an ongoing conversation about what reading is *for* and what different kinds of texts can do for them.

If helping students become readers is partly about helping them form reading identities, it's also about patience and progress over time. In the research brief's use of the word *become*, we are reminded that it's never too late. The students in our classrooms might not have been readers in the past, but they can become readers now—if we create conditions that support their individual development (see, for example, Mueller, 2001). Those conditions begin with the texts we provide. We need to introduce students to the great range of books that are available, and we must ensure that students don't feel outmatched by the books we put before them. Because YA titles are designed to be teen-friendly, they signal to students that reading is something they can do. With books like these, reading is accessible, worthwhile, and relevant to their lives in the present moment. Those messages are important for all teens to hear, regardless of their reading ability.

The research brief goes on to call for an approach to reading instruction that is rooted in knowledge of students and texts, as well as strategies that can bring them together. In terms of students, the brief tells us to pay attention to individuals and their reading histories. It reminds us that "students come to reading tasks with varied prior reading experiences, or prior knowledge, which can support their reading of complex texts" (xi; all page numbers for the policy research brief map to the version printed at the front of this book). In addition, some students may have developed "expertise with a particular kind of reading—science fiction or online games, for example—outside of school" (xi). If we know that these other dimensions of students' reading lives exist, we should draw on them as we introduce students to new kinds of texts and the new ways of reading they may demand (see, for example, Smith & Wilhelm, 2002).

In terms of texts, the brief tells us that "in and out of school, the texts students read vary significantly" (xi). We also know that different texts "place different demands on readers and require different strategies and approaches to reading" (xi). Therefore, as we plan our approach to reading in the classroom, we need to notice and value the range of texts students are already reading, and we need to talk about reading as an activity that is shaped by purpose and context. That means foregrounding questions about *why* we are reading any given text, *what* different texts have to offer, and *how* our purposes will guide what we attend to as we read.

Amidst these understandings about students and texts, the research brief centers on the role of motivation in reading growth, instruction, and achievement. Motivation has always been a core element in arguments about the value of young adult literature (see, for example, Herz & Gallo, 2005; Lesesne, 2010). As the brief states, "Engaged and motivated readers read more often and read more diverse texts than students who are unmotivated by the reading task" (xi). Motivation shapes the amount of time students spend reading as well as the number and kinds of texts they attempt to read in a given period. Motivated readers are more ambitious in their approach to texts and more invested in the act of reading.

The research brief makes a second important point about motivation, which is that "the level of difficulty or complexity in a text is not the only factor students consider in choosing texts; interest and motivation also matter" (xii). Too often we assume that students will not read texts that are long or texts they find to be difficult. Research tells us this is a false assumption. Motivation mediates the element of difficulty. Motivated readers *will* choose more challenging texts if they have a personal investment in reading them. Being motivated enriches what students look for, what they find, and what they are able to comprehend.

The takeaway here is that motivation is the foundation for effective reading instruction. Motivation will lead students to greater purposefulness and independence in reading. It will help them improve as readers of complex texts, and it will

broaden the range of texts they are willing to try. Because young adult literature is rooted in students' identities as adolescents, and because it is so vast a field, YA lit is uniquely suited to the goal of helping students develop identities as readers, along with the willingness to read widely and critically.

Implications for Instruction: Constructing YA Pedagogy

But we have to do more than put YA titles in front of students. We must employ research-based instructional approaches in our teaching of YA literature. The research brief points the way forward, not just for the use of YA lit in English class, but also for the development of a YA pedagogy—one that places student motivation at the center of our teaching while upholding the goals of rigor and complexity. This is a pedagogy that can push past the binaries that divide English departments. Developing it is less about inventing new lessons and assignments and more about the larger context we create for reading. If we want to teach reading in the ways the brief calls for, we must think deeply about how teaching YA literature effectively is tied to (1) the community we create in our classrooms, (2) the roles we take as teachers, and (3) the quality and relevance of the tasks we devise for students. Together, these three elements define YA pedagogy, and they open up new possibilities for our work with YA lit (see Figure 1.1).

Note that these elements are not in themselves new or unique in English teaching. What *is* unique is the act of blending them and placing YA lit at the core. While the following chapters immerse you in illustrations of these elements in real classrooms, I offer here a short discussion of each one, tracing its roots to principles outlined in the research brief.

1. *A classroom that cultivates reading community*

   Our classrooms must be designed to cultivate social interactions and a sense of shared community around books. According to the research brief, we should "develop students' ability to engage in meaningful discussion of the complex texts they read . . . so they can learn to negotiate and comprehend complex texts independently" (xiii). We should also design reading responses that "enable active construction of meaning," and we should "construct a collaborative environment that builds on the strengths of individual students" (xii).

   This emphasis on discussion and collaboration means we should give students the chance to do in school what they can't necessarily do elsewhere, which is count on the companionship of others as they read. We need to capitalize on the ways our thinking about books is enriched by discussions that expand our perspectives and cause us to come away with new insights. At school, those discussions can involve the whole class, or they can occur in small groups or between partners. We

Figure 1.1. Summary version of a conceptual framework for YA pedagogy.

A Conceptual Framework for YA Pedagogy

Definition of *YA pedagogy*: An approach to teaching YA lit that promotes love of reading, improving skills in reading, and connecting reading to real-world contexts. Designed to provide reading experiences with YA lit that are personally, socially, and academically relevant to teens of all kinds. Foregrounds valuing adolescence and cultivating complex experiences with YA texts.

Three core elements are necessary to put this pedagogy into practice: (1) a classroom that cultivates reading community; (2) a teacher who serves as book matchmaker and guide; (3) tasks that foster complexity, agency, and autonomy.

Why these three elements? And why must they work in tandem?

1. Through social interactions in the classroom, students and teachers create more complex and meaningful readings of YA literature. Reading YA titles together allows students to develop shared understandings about the field, markers of quality literature, and purposes that motivate readers over time.

2. To make the most of what YA lit has to offer, teens need adults to guide them to titles that are suited to their needs and that reward close and careful reading. To benefit from reading YA lit in school, teens need teachers who select books strategically and who frame work with those books in ways that satisfy the demands of the curriculum and the latest standards movement and/or testing regime.

3. The tasks we use to guide students' reading of YA lit should help them develop the same reading and writing skills they would acquire in any other English class. But tasks in YA pedagogy are designed to take students further: to support them in connecting their reading to real-world contexts and to equip them with tools they can use to continue reading closely, actively, and critically on their own.

engage students in shared meaning making as a step toward helping them develop the skill to comprehend complex texts independently.

For classroom discussion to be meaningful, however, it must simultaneously connect to students' interests and be grounded in close work with texts. We can call students to blend personal response with analysis of a text in a social environment that fosters complexity. Doing so will

deepen students' understanding of how texts work and why they respond as they do to texts of different kinds. We lay the groundwork for this dynamic classroom community by taking teens—and their literature—seriously.

2. *Teachers as expert matchmakers who bring books and students together*

In the past, many of us understood our role as English teacher to be that of expert on the canon. The research brief urges us to envision a new role that reflects expertise based in knowing books, knowing students, and knowing how to bring books and students together. This vision arises directly from what we as teachers know about the needs of students and how to address those needs. The brief calls on teachers "to play a key role in matching individual students with specific books at appropriate levels of complexity" (xi). Teacher expertise is essential here because "only teachers know students well enough to help them find the best book for the purpose at hand, something 'leveling' systems cannot do" (xi).

However, as important as this individual matchmaking work is, we must go further. We must engage in a parallel form of matchmaking that takes into account the demands of the curriculum and the larger contexts of our teaching. As we choose books in response to the interests and needs of particular students, we must also make strategic book selections for small-group and whole-class reading. Our matchmaking work in these areas must be guided by the skills we want to teach and the themes we want to explore as we read YA lit with our students. We need to make careful decisions that are shaped by a vision of different yet complementary reading experiences with YA literature over time.

All of this means we must invest in learning about the books that are available for teen readers so that we can continually envision new possibilities and new opportunities for our students. Rather than read and teach the same books year after year, we can rely on colleagues—and students—to introduce us to new titles written and published expressly for teens. We can find ideas and inspiration by connecting with the larger community of YA lit readers. When we read YA lit with others, we continually expand our knowledge of books, authors, and the conversation about teens and reading. What could be more energizing?

Despite the pressures we may feel from the standards movement and high-stakes tests, it's crucial for us to recognize the power we have to influence the lives of teen readers. Who else but an English teacher can respond in the moment to the intellectual and emotional needs of students by offering them good books? And who else can create shared reading experiences with powerful stories that change the ways students think about the world around them? As teachers we are ideally positioned to make strategic matches between teens and texts that will take our students to new places.

3. *Reading tasks that foster complexity, agency, and autonomy*

In addition to handing students good books, we must give students engaging and meaningful things to *do* with books. We know that our purposes as readers shape what we look for in texts, and we know that what we bring to a text contributes to what we find in it. In the real world, readers are always blending their personal response to a book with their analytic understanding of the text. Readers also instinctively search for connections between books and real-world contexts. Having the freedom to do these things is what allows us to become agents of our own reading lives.

As teachers of YA lit, we can foster complex reading experiences and promote reading autonomy if we devise classroom tasks that invite students to engage in these forms of blending and connecting. We don't have to create new tasks to achieve this goal. Instead, we can recast and reinvent what we already do.

The process of cultivating complexity, agency, and autonomy through reading tasks begins with offering students reading choice. The research brief tells us that effective reading instruction invites students "to choose texts, including nonfiction, for themselves, in addition to assigned ones" (xii). Having the opportunity to choose books helps students to "see themselves as capable readers who can independently use reading capabilities they learn in class" (xii). We know that reading choice has long been a staple of classrooms that include YA literature, but we also know that choice alone does not always help students become stronger readers. We must establish contexts for reading that challenge students to be purposeful and intentional in their choices.

One way to do this is to foreground meta-level questions about why we read. When we invite students to read for the same reasons that real readers do—to pursue topical interests, explore critical questions, take on new perspectives, and gain deeper understanding of their own lived experience—they become more capable and more committed to reading. Students can develop agency and autonomy as readers only if we give them room to shape the course of their reading.

But reading is not solely an individual exercise. It is also collaborative and social. In the real world, readers read with one another. They make meaning of texts through discussion and debate. They ground their reading in larger contexts in which work with books is guided by personal, professional, and sometimes organizational goals. We can apprentice students to these social ways of reading by shifting our approach to familiar classroom tasks.

For example, the research brief offers a number of ideas for social and purpose-driven reading such as assigning "multiple texts focused on the same topic," which helps students "improve comprehension through text-to-text connections" (xii). We can approach this theme-based reading in the familiar way by inviting students to examine how different

authors explore coming of age and finding one's place within family, school, or community. But we can take students' reading to the next level by linking it to the world of YA writing and publishing. How are today's authors both imitating and innovating as they produce new titles in relation to current bestsellers? Which authors are creating art and which are churning out copycat books designed to capitalize on a commercial trend? This too is an approach to reading that teaches students to make comparisons and connections across texts, but it's one that is relevant in the world outside the classroom.

Another instructional approach is to cultivate students' skills through writing about reading. The research brief suggests that we "connect students' reading of complex texts with writing that uses complex texts as models so they will recognize and be able to negotiate many different types of complex texts" (xiii). What students are being asked to do here is read less for content and more for knowledge of the ways texts are put together. As students become more conscious of how texts are written, they become more insightful as readers. We can make this work more meaningful by linking the study of texts to writing being done by today's YA authors. What can we learn from interviews in which authors discuss their personal writing process? How can we use what we learn from authors to improve our own writing process? Students become more independent as readers *and* writers when we ground their learning in real-world contexts.

Finally, the research brief urges us to anchor our teaching of reading in conversations about how we approach texts. We must teach students "how different textual purposes, genres, and modes require different strategies for reading," and we must demonstrate "how digital and visual texts including multimodal and multigenre texts require different approaches to reading" (xiii). With these points, the brief reminds us that the reading process is related to the purpose for reading and the nature of the text at hand. We can engage students in meta conversations about what we do as readers of YA books, and we can involve them in evaluating their reading processes. But once more, we can heighten the relevance of that work by embedding it in a real-world context. We might ask questions such as: How do our reading strategies change when we're preparing to write a professional review of a YA book, serve on a YA literature award committee, or analyze how publishers are marketing YA titles to specific target audiences? Meta conversations become relevant when we have a reason to reflect on our reading process and adjust it based on the nature of the reading task.

In each of these ways, with only a slight shift in our approach to instruction, we can foster complexity, agency, and autonomy in students' reading lives. If we want students to grow as readers, we must design tasks that call them to complexity. But we must also give them authentic reasons to read. We can equip them with tools to use in their work with different texts, but if we want them to use those tools of their own

> accord, they must develop a personal understanding of what reading is good for. The result will be a sense of autonomy in reading that they can carry with them once their time in our classroom is over.

Why Do We Need YA Pedagogy?

The Binary Paradigm

This vision of teaching YA lit with YA pedagogy is something I've come to after years of teaching in what I call a binary paradigm. If you're a teacher, you know what the binary looks like. You've probably seen it in your own school. All you have to do is walk down the hall and glance in the doors of different English classrooms. Look at the books students are reading and how those books are being taught, and you'll witness the binary in action.

Here's the first part of the binary paradigm. In some classrooms, students sit at their desks with a classic novel in front of them. Maybe it's *The Great Gatsby* or maybe it's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The teacher stands at the front of the room, and students listen to the teacher talk about the text. During class they turn to pages the teacher has flagged for close reading, and they follow along as the teacher explains what's going on in key passages or scenes. For homework they read the next few chapters, sometimes answering study questions designed to serve as a reading guide. Periodically they take quizzes and write essays. The primary mode of instruction is class discussion. On some days, the discussion is spirited and memorable: the teacher's love for the book shines through, and students catch onto that passion. More often than not, however, what happens isn't discussion. It's recitation. Students sit back and wait to be told what the book means.

This is the traditional English classroom: a place where the study of literature is rooted in a teacher-centered approach that we've probably all experienced at some point in our schooling. If you've taught in this way, you know that this approach fails to engage a lot of our students, and yet it's still our primary model for reading instruction, especially in high school. We use the space of English class to expose students to books they probably wouldn't read otherwise, and we set up discussions that we hope will lead students to get what we got from important works of literature. We tell ourselves that this way of doing English has merit because it teaches students how to struggle with hard texts and how to read those texts more critically.

But the truth is, if students aren't reading—if instead they're picking up what they need to know from listening to class discussion, skimming CliffsNotes, or watching the movie version of an assigned book—then English class isn't helping them become better readers. All it's doing is helping them learn how to fake read (Kittle, 2013) and parrot back others' ideas. What's worse, for students who find

reading to be difficult or who have never experienced pleasure and personal enjoyment in reading, struggling with hard texts is basically an impossible task. We can blind ourselves to this reality, or we can acknowledge that despite our good intentions, when we teach with these books and these methods we aren't making books complex as much as searching for ways to make their complexity manageable for struggling and disengaged readers.

Out of a desire to disrupt these patterns and reach more students, many of us have turned to young adult literature as part of a student-centered approach to teaching English. Here is the opposite side of the binary: classrooms where students lounge on couches and beanbag chairs, reading books they've chosen for themselves based on their personal tastes and interests. Students read silently or browse for new books from the classroom library shelves. The teacher may read with them, or she may move through the room, conferring with individual students and recording their progress on a clipboard. Alternately, students may meet in literature circle discussion groups (Daniels, 1994), stand up to give book talks, or work on writing. Instead of taking quizzes, they keep lists of books they've completed, and they compose personal responses in reading notebooks. The primary mode of instruction is one-on-one conferencing, complemented by whole-class mini-lessons that equip students with knowledge of genres, text features, and reading strategies (see, for example, Atwell, 2014; Miller & Moss, 2013).

This is the workshop version of English class: an environment designed to meet the needs of individual students through reading choice and age-appropriate literature. There's more energy here, and body language indicates there's more real reading going on. But if we stop to take a closer look, there's still cause for concern. A lot of these students blow through books without thinking very deeply about the story or the text. Reading quantity happens at the expense of reading quality. In notebook entries and class discussion, students focus more on their personal lives than on the ideas in the books or the nuances of the writing. They find books to love, but they don't read outside their comfort zones, dig deeply into themes, or participate in larger conversations about the impact of specific books on our culture. If we're honest, we must acknowledge that reading YA lit in the space of the workshop may draw more students to books, but without a pedagogy designed to ask more of them, it doesn't necessarily push students to improve as readers of complex texts.

The Binary in My Own Teaching

During my years in the high school classroom, I found myself at various times on either side of this binary. In my first job at an urban high school in New Jersey in the early 1990s, I taught in the same traditional ways my former teachers had

taught me. I followed the district's genre-based curriculum and worked my way through the list of required ninth-grade texts, but I struggled to articulate a larger purpose for our work. When we read short stories from the textbook, it seemed that the point of reading was to build knowledge of literary terms, but I didn't know how to make the study of those terms more than a vocabulary exercise. When we read Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War*, we had the opportunity to explore how authors develop themes in novels, but I didn't have a clear vision for how to structure that exploration, so students spent most of their time taking quizzes and rehashing the plot. In our reading of *Romeo and Juliet*, we focused again on literary terms, but most of the unit was dedicated to the long slog through the text, with the movie as our reward at the end. When we got to Greek mythology, I didn't know what to focus on, so I quizzed students on the names of gods and goddesses, and we made mythology board games.

I cringe when I look back on this time in my career, but my plot-heavy, quiz-oriented approach was more or less the same as what my colleagues were doing. No matter how interesting, important, and well-written these texts were, students weren't invested in them, and neither was I. With this combination of books and methods, I failed to create engaged readers. I also failed to foster complex reading experiences.

On the advice of one of my former teachers who had become active in the National Writing Project, I read Linda Rief's *Seeking Diversity* (1991), followed by Nancie Atwell's *In the Middle* (1987), during the summer after my first year of teaching. I fell in love with those books. I stayed up late at night reading them. The workshop model captivated me: I wanted to create the kind of inspiring classroom environment I was reading about—one where students could find their own books to love. Feeling bold and determined, I built a small classroom library out of the YA novels I had collected when I was a teenager and an assortment of raggedy paperbacks I bought from the used bookstore in my hometown.

When I returned to New Jersey for my second year, my teaching was still incoherent, but I saw more students reading with investment. Their reading was all over the place, as was mine: Stephen King, paperback romances, adult thrillers, occasional nonfiction. Sometimes they—and I—read young adult literature. Like Atwell, I required students to write letters to me in their reading response notebooks. I wrote back. I forged personal connections with students through books, but I couldn't say with any certainty what they were learning as readers other than the idea that reading could be fun. Meanwhile, when I took breaks from reading workshop to cover the core grade-level texts, I defaulted back to quizzes and study questions. I couldn't figure out how to synthesize our reading in the workshop with our reading of core texts. I had fallen into a binary in my own teaching. Moreover, neither side of the binary was getting us to the goal of reading complexity.

At the end of the second year, I quit my job in New Jersey, moved to Michigan, and got hired as a book clerk at Borders Books and Music in Ann Arbor. Based on my enjoyment of young adult literature as a teenager, I began making regular visits to the YA shelves. I studied the titles we stocked. Soon I was reading newly published YA lit, and I was reading it voraciously. The more new titles I discovered—works by authors such as Francesca Lia Block, Chris Crutcher, John Marsden, and Jacqueline Woodson—the more I wanted to return to teaching, mainly so I could share these books with students.

After just one year at Borders, I was lucky to find a job teaching English in a suburban district near Ann Arbor. At Canton High School, I was able to pick up where I left off with the ninth-grade reading workshop. I had my department administrator's blessing, and I had more book knowledge under my belt. Again, however, I was faced with engineering a fit between the workshop portion of the ninth-grade course, which focused on YA literature, and units dedicated to our required grade-level texts, which were classics.

Meanwhile I was also charged with teaching tenth-grade American Lit, a course that seemed to have clearer goals: students were meant to study a body of literature while developing their skills as readers and writers. For some of my colleagues, literature study was chronological; for others, it was thematic. I tried both approaches, but neither centered enough on students to satisfy me. I tried weaving in other methods I was learning. I paired books with movies, as my mentor teacher did. I offered some reading choice through literature circles. I got better at leading discussions, and I discovered how books could engage us in important conversations. We read *Walden* and talked about living simply. We read *Native Son* and talked about racism. I appreciated the sense of connectedness we found through our shared experience of these texts, and I enjoyed watching students construct meaning. When I asked them to write about significant quotes, they had interesting things to say. When I asked them to pose questions about the text, their questions were thoughtful. In certain moments, the work felt fulfilling, but I knew I wasn't reaching everyone. Still, this approach seemed to get us closer to the goal of complexity.

I knew what was missing in American Lit: students needed more opportunity for choice and more texts that were relevant to them. Only as I got better at teaching American Lit could I start to see what was missing in my teaching of YA lit. I wanted to strengthen my ninth-grade class by borrowing from what I saw my most creative colleagues doing in American Lit, but I couldn't figure out how to integrate our different approaches. The more we talked, the more I realized that my like-minded colleagues faced the same struggle. They told me they wanted to inspire readers the way I did with YA lit, but they felt they didn't know enough about the books, and they couldn't figure out how to manage reading choice. I wanted to

engage ninth graders in discussions organized around big ideas, but I didn't know how to do that through my workshop approach to YA lit.

Consequently, my colleagues and I remained stuck on opposite sides of the binary, despite our mutual appreciation of what the other side had to offer. Across the department, we acknowledged that as individuals we had committed ourselves to these different ways of teaching, but collectively we didn't do anything to bridge the binary paradigm. We just expected students to adapt in each context.

Eventually I quit teaching to go to grad school. When I became a professor and started teaching YA literature in college, my students and I studied YA lit as a literary field; at the same time, we studied our lives as readers. At last I saw glimmers of a synthesis. Rigorous reading of texts, reading for personal enjoyment, social experiences with books: the different dimensions of reading, and the teaching of reading, were starting to become visible.

Then, in the midst of writing this book, I was hired for a literacy consulting job in a local school district where I encountered the binary all over again. Middle school teachers ran reading workshops centered on YA literature. Then students went on to a high school English curriculum steeped in the classics. Teachers at the middle school took pride in the love their students developed for reading through choice in the workshop. Echoing Atwell (2007), they expressed frustration at how students lost that choice at the high school. "I just think it's really different," an eighth-grade teacher told me. "And I'm not sure if that's good for kids. Or working for kids as readers." She added that she didn't get the sense that the high school teachers valued YA lit. "But clearly if you look from the outside, the high school looks more rigorous. They read so many books. No one's questioning that."

A teacher at the high school countered this critique by describing students who arrived in ninth grade with a lack of reading stamina brought on by having had too much choice in middle school. She went on to complicate the goal of getting kids to love reading: "I think we need to define 'loving reading' as not just reading books I feel comfortable with and books that make me feel good," she said. "Personally I love reading that challenges my thinking, whether it's the way I think about the world or how it stretches my intellectual ability." However, in conversations with her middle school colleagues, she felt like she had to defend this goal. "I'm not taking children who you taught to love reading and ruining that by asking them to read a hard text. We all want kids to love reading. But saying 'loving reading' feels very—I'm not sure that's the best way to describe reading for high school. Loving is not my priority. I think you can love reading and never challenge yourself. And that's a concern that I have."

As I reflected on these conversations, I saw more clearly than ever before how students were caught in the middle of the binary, forced to adapt to different texts, methods, and goals while adults in different buildings remained wedded to

their different approaches. Teachers on both sides believed in the rightness of the work they were doing. Those at the high school made an important point when they argued that students should be expected to read in more sophisticated ways as they grow older. At the same time, the goal of teaching the canon led them to keep assigning texts like *The Odyssey* even when it was clear that students weren't reading them. Still, an administrator defended this practice: "As a literate individual, it helps to have knowledge of that story, as opposed to some obscure YA novel no one's heard about," he told me. "I think there are plenty of kids who didn't read *The Odyssey*, but they *know* about it. Am I bummed they didn't read it? Yeah. But they still wrote about it and thought about it."

Gallo (2001) argued years ago that feeding students a strict diet of the classics only serves to create an aliterate society. He wrote, "We are a nation that teaches its children how to read in the early grades, then forces them in their teenage years to read literary works that most of them dislike so much that they have no desire whatsoever to continue those experiences into adulthood" (p. 36). Unfortunately, despite our best intentions, this dynamic is still present in many English classes. Gallo said that helping our students love reading should be our primary goal as English teachers, and he advocated for YA texts as literature that gives us our best shot at getting there. Again, though, when we position YA books as literature that's mainly good for enjoyment, we preserve the binary, and we shut down other possibilities for these books and our students as readers.

Consequences of the Binary

Only now can I see what we lose by allowing the binary to remain in place. Only now can I see the damaging messages we send to kids about books, reading, and readers through the binary paradigm. Here's what our stance toward books, and our corresponding methods, communicate:

- There are *fun* books and there are *required* books. Required books aren't fun; fun books aren't required.
- The only books worth struggling with are classics. Popular titles, including books written for teens, are meant to be enjoyed, not studied or analyzed.
- Some books are hard and important, other books are entertaining and enjoyable, but few books are both.
- There is pleasure reading, which you do when you read YA lit, and there is analytical reading, which you do when you study the classics, but these modes of reading do not overlap.
- There is reading you do for yourself, which is satisfying and worthwhile, and there is reading you do for English class, which is disconnected from the things you care about.

- Some people read for fun; other people read for an intellectual challenge. If you're going to keep reading, you're going to have to choose one mode over the other. Nobody does both.

These damaging messages don't emanate from the books themselves. Rather, they arise from a narrow vision of texts and teaching. Because of the binary evolution of our methods—traditional literature study for the classics and workshop teaching for YA lit—we've come to view certain texts and methods as locked together. Even if the division of books and methods isn't as rigid as I've described, the *perception* of difference remains. As a result, classrooms where we read the classics and classrooms where we read YA books seem to exist in different universes, driven by different value systems and set up to deliver different outcomes. This locking together of books and methods teaches students to view reading as a series of hierarchies: good books vs. books you look down on; serious reading vs. superficial reading; smart, skillful readers vs. those who settle for entertainment. As a result of our acquiescence to the binary, the potential of both YA literature and the classics is diminished.

It doesn't have to be this way. We can make room for YA lit in classrooms of all kinds, and we can teach these works using a blended approach that marries the goals of rigor and pleasure, skill and enjoyment, stamina and passion. In this way, we can engage and motivate students while helping them become more capable and committed readers of complex texts. Instead of labeling books as good or bad, we can investigate what readers are *doing* with them.

Personalizing YA Pedagogy

YA pedagogy offers a way to imagine new possibilities for our teaching of YA lit, but there's still a lot to figure out when it comes to implementing this approach, including big questions to consider, such as:

- What does everyday work with YA lit look like if we go beyond the reading workshop model?
- How do we teach students to blend personal and analytic work with YA texts as they engage in social reading experiences with their peers?
- How do we introduce YA titles, and frame the purpose of our work with them, if we teach in a context in which YA literature is viewed as "less than"?
- How do we connect our teaching of YA lit to what students have done, and will do, as readers in other English classes?

There is no one right answer to any of these questions. Each of us who teaches YA lit must develop an approach that is right for our context. We must also be patient and accept that our work with YA texts will grow and change over time. As we

become more knowledgeable about the books, we will become more sophisticated in our methods of teaching them.

The teachers you'll meet in this book have personalized their use of YA pedagogy in order to engage readers of all kinds—from tweens at the start of middle school to seniors who are about to graduate from high school; from students who are college-bound to those in alternative ed. These teachers are experts now, but none of them started out that way. Each one has a story to tell about discovering YA lit and making the decision to bring it into the classroom. Like all of us who teach YA literature, they built their knowledge of the books gradually, guided by recommendations from fellow readers, their personal tastes and preferences, and sensitivity to the needs of students. Discovering one good YA book whet their appetite for more. Seeing students' responses convinced them that investing in young adult literature was worth it.

While each of these teachers takes a personalized approach to teaching YA lit, what they share is a common stance toward books, students, and reading. When it comes to *books*, they encourage students to enjoy YA lit, but they also challenge students to read YA texts closely and deeply. As for *students*, they communicate that regardless of skill level or prior history, everyone is capable of reading. They use book recommendations to show students that they see them as individuals. While they value students' tastes and interests, they also challenge them to take risks and try new things. With regard to *reading in school*, they establish purposes that go beyond logging pages, completing projects, and taking tests. Instead they create opportunities for students to engage with YA lit in a social environment designed to make reading relevant and meaningful. They show students there is something to get from these books, and they guide them in the getting.

Stance toward Books, Students, and Reading in YA Pedagogy

- *Books*. We encourage students to enjoy YA lit, but we also challenge them to read YA texts closely and deeply.
- *Students*. We communicate to students that regardless of skill level or prior history, everyone is capable of reading. We use YA book recommendations to show students that we see them as individuals. We value their tastes and interests. We also challenge them to take risks and try new things.
- *Reading*. We establish purposes for reading that go beyond logging pages read, completing projects, and taking tests. Instead we create opportunities for students to engage with YA lit in a social environment designed to make reading relevant and meaningful.

In the chapters to come, I invite you to develop your own version of YA pedagogy by introducing you to teachers and students around the country whose lives have been changed by this literature and this way of teaching it.

Chapter 2 presents an introduction to YA lit as a field and a new way of thinking about the concept of text complexity. I share examples of what com-

plexity looks like in specific YA titles, and I offer a vision for finding and making complexity through YA pedagogy.

Chapters 3–5 focus on the three elements that constitute YA pedagogy. Chapter 3 explores *classroom reading community* and illustrates what it looks like across three different settings. I show the common stance that connects YA classrooms, and I share a framework to guide you in constructing a reading community that will support YA pedagogy in your own classroom. Chapter 4 defines the role of *teacher as matchmaker* and shows what matchmaking looks like when it takes into account both the needs of individual students and the larger contexts for students' reading. I offer resources to help you build knowledge of YA lit as you search for books that will be right for your setting. Chapter 5 introduces a vision for *tasks that foster complexity*, *agency*, *and autonomy* by linking students' work with YA literature to real-world contexts. I take six familiar ELA tasks and show what they look like when we recast them through YA pedagogy. I share examples of how individual teachers have reinvented these tasks in response to demands and possibilities in their local contexts.

Chapter 6 connects YA pedagogy to assessment. I introduce a vision of assessment that values personal *and* analytical work with YA lit. I share three ideas for creative assessments that depart from traditional unit tests and analytic essays, and I discuss what a group of high school students did when they were given the freedom to develop projects that put their knowledge of YA lit to work in their school and community.

Chapter 7 makes the case for outreach as something that goes with the territory when we teach young adult literature. I offer a variety of ideas for outreach that help us get the word out about YA lit and this way of teaching it.

If we want to meet the needs of *all* students, we have to imagine new kinds of reading experiences with new kinds of texts. We can show parents, administrators, and colleagues that YA literature has unique potential to engage our students as readers—young people who come to school with wildly different levels of interest, ability, and investment in reading but who all deserve the chance to love books.

In the face of those who would say otherwise, we should argue that YA lit can provide reading experiences that are both academically challenging and personally meaningful for the diverse teens we teach. We should advocate for a pedagogical approach that sees this blend of intellectual and emotional engagement as essential for student learning. We should have the courage to challenge old orthodoxies and advocate for the young people before us whose questions, passions, and life experiences can be affirmed and extended through literature if we give them literature that is relevant to their needs and questions.

This book is designed to help you foster your own vision for teaching YA lit in the secondary classroom. Those of you who are already immersed in YA lit will find validation for the teaching you currently do. Perhaps the ideas you discover in these pages will help you to refine the vision you already have. Perhaps they will point you in new directions.

Those of you who are new to young adult literature will find ideas—and, I hope, inspiration—in the stories of colleagues who made the commitment to teach YA books in spite of the obstacles they faced. From this foundation, you can build your own version of YA pedagogy that will bring these books—and your students' reading lives—to life. You have the power to teach YA literature. All you have to do is make the decision to begin.

Reading Instruction for *All* Students

(adapted from NCTE's Policy Research Brief)

Reading instruction has always been stressed for elementary school students, but today it takes on increased importance for *all* grades. Reports such as *Time to Act* and *Reading at Risk* raise concern about a lack of depth in the literacy education of adolescent students and lament a general decline in reading among young adults. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for reading state that "all students must be able to comprehend texts of steadily increasing complexity as they progress through school," and studies of literacy point to the rising expectations for reading in both schooling and the workplace. Documents like these indicate that teachers need to help all students become readers, regardless of whether they are in elementary or secondary school, so they can succeed in the information age.

Centered in a strong research base, this brief suggests:

1. Students come to reading tasks with varied prior reading experiences, or prior knowledge, which can support their reading of complex texts.
2. Students who are engaged and motivated readers read more often and read more diverse texts than students who are unmotivated by the reading task.
3. Students who develop expertise with a particular kind of reading—science fiction or online games, for example—outside of school may not think this kind of reading will be valued by their teachers.
4. In and out of school, the texts students read vary significantly, from linear text-only books to multimodal textbooks to online hypertexts, each of which places different demands on readers and requires different strategies and approaches to reading.
5. Students read texts from a variety of disciplines, so content area literacy is important.
6. The level of difficulty or complexity in a text is not the only factor students consider in choosing texts; interest and motivation also matter.
7. Readability or Lexile levels can vary significantly within a single text, so it is important to consider other dimensions of textual complexity.

Jennifer Buehler knows young adult literature. A teacher educator, former high school teacher, and host of ReadWriteThink.org's *Text Messages* podcast, she has shared her enthusiasm for this vibrant literature with thousands of teachers and adolescents. She knows that middle and high school students run the gamut as readers, from nonreaders to struggling readers to reluctant readers to dutiful readers to enthusiastic readers. And in a culture where technological distractions are constant, finding a way to engage all of these different kinds of readers is challenging, no matter the form of delivery. More and more, literacy educators are turning to YA lit as a way to transform all teens into enthusiastic readers. If we want to meet the needs of all students as readers, we have to offer books they can—and want to—read. Today's YA lit provides the books that speak to the world of teens even as they draw them out into the larger world.

But we have to do more than put YA titles in front of students and teach these books as we've traditionally taught more canonical works. Instead, we can implement a YA pedagogy—one that revolves around student motivation while upholding the goals of rigor and complexity. Buehler explores the three core elements of a YA pedagogy with proven success in practice: (1) a classroom that cultivates a reading community; (2) a teacher who serves as book matchmaker and guide; and (3) tasks that foster complexity, agency, and autonomy in teen readers.

With a supporting explication of NCTE's Policy Research Brief *Reading Instruction for* All *Students* and lively vignettes of teachers and students reading with passion and purpose, this book is designed to help teachers develop their own version of YA pedagogy and a vision for teaching YA lit in the middle and secondary classroom.

Jennifer Buehler is an associate professor of English education at Saint Louis University, where she teaches courses on young adult literature, writing pedagogy, secondary English methods, content literacy, urban education, and ethnography. She was the 2016 president of ALAN, the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English.

NCTE National Council of Teachers of English
1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096
Phone: 800-369-6283 or 217-328-3870
www.ncte.org